

Boney James - The Beat (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing* 2. *Sunset Boulevard* 3. *Missing You* 4. *Batucada (The Beat)* 5. *Maker Of Love* 6. *Mari's Song* 7. *Powerhouse* 8. *The Midas (This Is Why)* 9. *Acalento (Lullaby)* 10. *You Can Count On Me* Personnel: Boney James: soprano, tenor and alto saxophone, flute, keyboards; Brandon Coleman: keyboards (1, 2); Vinnie Colaiuta: drums (1, 9, 10); Lenny Castro: percussion (1-4, 6-10); Rob Bacon: guitar (2, 4, 7, 10); Dewayne "Smitty" Smith: bass (2, 10); Omari Williams: drums (2, 4, 7); Jarius Mozee: guitar, keyboards, programming (3); Abi Mancha: vocals (3); Tim Carmon: keyboards, keyboard bass (4, 6, 8); Alex Al: bass (4, 6, 7, 9); Rick Braun: trumpet (4); Raheem DeVaughn: vocals (5); Phil Davis: keyboards, programming (5); Mark Stephens: keyboards (7, 9); Natalie "The Floacist" Stewart: vocals (8)

After a brief sojourn for Verve Forecast with 2011's *Contact*, Boney James returns home to Concord for *The Beat*. Aptly titled, this is the recording where the composer and saxophonist weds his love for both R&B and Latin music, weaving them together in his trademark brand of contemporary jazz. Besides James, the other star on this date is all-star percussionist Lenny Castro, whose use of congas, timbales, bongos, and numerous other instruments adds dimension, flavor, and punch to most of these cuts. A cover of Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing," is the opener. It's played as a lithe bossa nova. Drummer Vinnie Colaiuta and Castro exchange accents in all the right places as James uses his soprano to glide through the melody. Another highlight is the cover of the Sergio Mendes classic "Batucada," with longtime friend and collaborator Rick Braun lending his trumpet. In James' arrangement, this is 21st century jazz funk with the two-horn frontline backed by Rob Bacon's stinging guitar, Alex Al's bassline, Tim Carmon's keyboard washes -- including a second bassline -- and keen interplay between punchy drummer Omari Williams and Castro. Braun's solo is short but very tight. Soul crooner Raheem DeVaughn appears on the slippery meld of old-school soul and laid-back funky jazz on "Maker of Love." Natalie "The Floacist" Stewart offers her rhyming and signing skill to "They Midas (This Is Why)." It simmers with a sexy, nocturnal feel and illustrates modern club jazz at its best. "Sunset Boulevard" wanders into the jazz fields more, with lovely piano work from Brandon Coleman and a low-end strutting bass by Dwayne "Smitty" Smith. "Powerhouse" melds Latin funk to fingerpopping contemporary jazz, while "You Can Count on

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Me" -- with one of James' most memorable melodies in ages -- weds Brazilian MPB, languid R&B, and emotive smooth jazz, and sends it all out on a high note. His tenor playing here is wide open and sultry. While The Beat is not as uptempo as its title might imply, it more than compensates with the layers of rhythms inherent in its tunes. There are no low points on the set, only grooves galore. --- Thom Jurek, Rovi

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